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## HIRCUS, THE DANCING BILLY GOAT

By  
MICKEY FINN

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It was Christmas eve, and Patrick Doolan, the foreman of the gas works, had summoned a goodly company of his friends to celebrate the holiday season and the arrival of two barrels of Irish turf from his native town. A bushel of this peat lay glowing in the fireplace. While the snow was softly piling itself upon the window casings and the wind was taking liberties with the shutters, Judy Callahan stily plumed upon the lapel of Dick Walsh, the letter carrier, a sprig of Irish ivy. By inquiry from rheumatic Flaherty, who sat in the ingle nook nourishing his shins, Dick learned that the symbolic meaning of Irish ivy is "I cling to thee." Judy's shriek a moment later indicated that



"Twas THREE MONTHS O' STRAP AND CARROT."

Dick had taken advantage of the information. Just then Jack Doolan, the youthful heir to the Doolan estate, put his head inside the door.

"Father, can I bring in the nanny? The snow is fallin' on her through the

roof, and she's tremblin' wid the cold."

"Of course, my son," said Mr. Doolan heartily. "Bring her in. We don't want our milk watered."

"That's a false waste you have there," said Flaherty. "How much milk does she give?"

"Two quarts a day, but she used to give three quarts a day before her husband died. She's plain away since that time, poor girl. I think 'tis the love sickness she has," said Mr. Doolan.

"Dear, dear, look at that, now?" said Mrs. Reagan sympathetically. "I always said that nanny goats was sentimental. And how long is the billy goat dead, Mr. Doolan?"

"'Tis five years the 24th day of this month," replied Doolan. "Sorrah day 'twas when we lost Hircus. A more gayin' nor a more willin' goat you would not find in all Harrlem. Sure his death was a tragedy and a calamity."

"How was that?" quavered old man Dougherty, the stonemason.

"Well," resumed Doolan, "twas a tragedy the way he was translated and a calamity when his death took away the only chance I ever had o' makin' a fortune."

"Is square about goats?" continued Doolan. "They are born with a certain amount of education. Show me the goat that wouldn't know a cabbage or a turnip when he sees it. Of course a goat knows nothin' about machinery. There was a goat that used to stop the horses drawin' a street car, but when they put a trolley car on the track you couldn't find that much of the goat as would grease a middle. But a goat can be educated wid sugar and a strap to do tricks. Now, I suppose some o' ye would believe me if I told ye that I taught Hircus to dance us fine a jig or hornpipe as ever you saw in a theater."

A chorus of disbelief arose.

"Yes," said Doolan, "and no Irish lady could do a finer pass solo on her toes, as they say in the heathen language. You must remember that I was very poor, and I'd be layin' awake nights thinkin' o' some plan by way o' makin' a fortune, and when my wife bought the two kids to start the dairy the idee came to me like a flash—I could educate the goat to dance. When I got that idee in me head I could think o' nothin' else. Cassidy, how much money do you think a dancin' goat could earn on a theater stage?"

"Well," replied Cassidy, "I should think that \$300 a week would be none too little for so dignified a curiosity."

"There," resumed Doolan. "I've heard what Cassidy says? Three hundred dollars a week for half an hour's work a day? Faith, I felt the money in me hand. But 'twas werry work makin' the goat. An old animal trainer told me that cruetty and kindness mixed would do the job. Wide and deep

mined me I belted his ribs and gave him carrots, but while he got stubborn I lathered him with a strap. Mrs. O'Brien, you remember the time we had teachin' Hircus to walk across the room on his hind legs?"

"Deed I do, Doolan!" said Mrs. O'Brien, with a reminiscent sigh.

"Ye'll excuse me, ladies and gentlemen," said Flaherty, rising and putting on his hat, "but I must leave ye. A dancin' goat is too much for my voracity. I couldn't swallow it."

When the door had closed Doolan went on: "Every night after supper the table was shoved back agin the wall and the lesson began. And, would you believe it, it takes three months to teach the goat to stand on his hind legs for five minutes! After that 'twas easier. There was a little girl named Ellen next door that took a great interest in the education of the goat. She was about the size of the goat when she stood up, and 'twas pure joy to see Hircus waitin' around the kitchen to the music of my fiddle. With the goat's head on her shoulder and her arms around his neck they would whirl slowly around in the dancin' circles of the mazy, as the poet says."

"How perfectly lovely!" exclaimed Judy Callahan.

"After the lesson was over each night I used to give the goat all kinds of tasty things, like potato peelin's, cabbage stumps and such like, as a reward, and 'twas the habit o' beginnin' the goat hungry all day that led to the loss of my fortune. 'Twas three months o' strap and carrots before the goat could do a decent heel and toe, work as hard as I might, and two werry months before he would nod his head and make a bow the same as if he was before an audience."

"Thank to that now," said Dougherty to Judy Callahan in a whisper. "A goat makin' a bow?"

"As I said before," Doolan went on, "when the goat had learned to bow at a wink we made his billy suit. The thing that cost the most was the skirt, made of red silk and shaped like a parasol. It looked like a hollyhock turned upside down. Then we put a little green cap wid a red tassel on the goat's head and a pair o' white slippers on his feet. And when we showed him his picture in the glass he reined like a woman puttin' on her Sunday bonnet. The tears fill me eyes when I think that only for that joker Reagan I might be ridin' in me own devil wagon wid rubber wheels."

"The first public appearance of the goat as a lady dancer took place in a barn in the Bronx. We fixed up a stage wid planks and boxes, and 25 cents was charged at the door. The news got around, and long before the time to begin the show the barn was crowded to the doors. Half the roof was gone off the barn, but that hurt

nothin', for the night was clear. I was so afraid that the goat wouldn't do his work that I gave him nothin' to eat for twelve hours before he came on the stage, and the poor beast was fair famished. When I walked out on the stage, hand in hand wid the goat, I thought the audience would go crazy. They yelled wid sheer delight when the goat made his bow, and every man in the barn was on his feet, and a hundred o' them had cabbage leaves and carrots in their pockets to give to the goat, like the ladies have hokays to give to the play actors. As the goat whirled around down a waltz he would stop now and then to pick a bit o' cabbage or turnip that some one threw on the stage. But 'twas what that rogue Reagan



"HE WHIRLED AROUND WITHOUT TOUCHIN' THE FLOOR."

gan threw that the coat liked the best. They looked like little pieces of bread covered wid sugar. The goat picked up so many of the little crumbs that the crowd yelled to put Reagan out because he was stoppin' the show, and I had hard work to get the goat dancin' agin. After that the goat seemed to get lighter and lighter upon his feet until he hardly touched the stage. There were times when he whirled around in the air widout touchin' the floor, and the crowd gasped wid astonishment at this wonderful feat. And while he whirled he seemed to be gettin' bigger and bigger till he was as round as a balloon the boys play wid. He would go up in the air, whirlin' like a pinwheel, for ten feet, and then light on the stage soft as a thistle-down, and fly up agin till he spun up farther and farther, lookin'

like a red umbrella on a big punkin, and he was gone through the hole in the roof, thrashed intirely."

"And where did he go?" said the awe-struck Mrs. Cassidy in a whisper.

"Some o' the little boys sittin' on the fence outside said he went up in the direction of O'Hara, and others said 'twas toward Arcurus and Neptune he went."

"And what was it that Reagan gave the goat?" said the materialside Walsh, anxious for an explanation of the seeming miracle.

"'Twas yeast cakes that the rogue had covered wid sugar, and the goat ate fifteen o' them."

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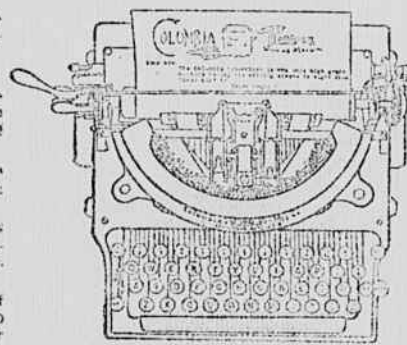
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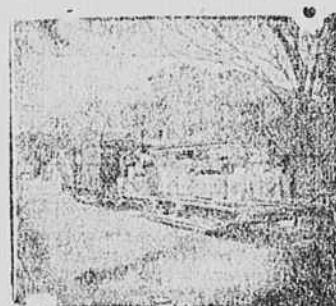
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